

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 23, 2021

Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz
U.S. House of Representatives
Appropriations Subcommittee on Military
Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related
Agencies
HT-2, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member John Carter
U.S. House of Representatives
Appropriations Subcommittee on Military
Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related
Agencies
HT-2, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Wasserman Schultz and Ranking Member Carter,

We write to request inclusion of language in the Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill to ensure adequate care for veterans suffering from severe traumatic brain injuries (TBI) who require long-term residential care.

Since 2014, over 470,000 veterans have been diagnosed with a TBI. From 2016, when the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) began tracking severe TBIs as a separate category, until August 2019, 3,375 veterans were diagnosed with severe TBIs. These men and women bravely served our country and now require long-term care. The VA must anticipate and prepare for the needs of these veterans and their families.

While veterans with mild or moderate TBIs may return to full health after appropriate care, veterans with severe TBIs will be affected for the rest of their lives. Those veterans are likely to exhibit changes in memory, reasoning, impulse control, appropriate behavior, language, and emotional regulation. As a result, they will require an intensive level of long-term care.

For some veterans with severe TBIs, the VA's Caregiver Program is an acceptable option. However, not every veteran with severe TBI has a caregiver who can provide the level of daily attention required. Further, as caregivers age, veterans will find themselves in need of professional long-term care. Given that most veterans who experience severe TBIs are young and physically active, traditional long-term care facilities, such as nursing homes, are not usually a good fit. A more appropriate option for such veterans is high-quality specialty residential facilities that offer services for individuals who have suffered severe TBIs. Access to such facilities provides every veteran with the best chance for a fulfilling and independent life.

Despite repeated inquiries from Congress, the VA has been unable to articulate how it plans to provide this type of care for veterans with a severe TBI; VA caseworkers and stakeholders are unaware of programs that would pay for long-term care; and families of veterans in need of such services are unable to clearly identify programs that will help their loved ones.

On February 19, 2020, the GAO released a report entitled “Veterans’ Use of Long-Term Care is Increasing, and the VA Faces Challenges in Meeting the Demand” (GAO-20-284) which identified long-term care for specialty needs as an area that needs to be addressed. The report states that the VA’s Geriatric and Extended Care Office “has not established measurable goals for its efforts to address difficulties meeting veterans’ needs for specialty care” and that “without measurable goals...VA is limited in its ability to better plan for and understand progress towards addressing the challenges it faces meeting veterans’ long-term care needs.”

As a result, we request that the following language be included in the fiscal year 2022 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies appropriations bill:

Long-Term Care for Veterans with Severe Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).—The Committee continues to note the increasing prevalence of deployment-related traumatic brain injuries. This increase continues to demonstrate the longstanding need for providing adequate long-term specialty care for Veterans suffering from severe TBIs. The Committee remains concerned about the Department’s inability to articulate a plan to provide such residential care to Veterans with severe TBIs. The Committee directs VA to 1) ensure an adequate number of long-term residential care facilities tailored to care for Veterans with severe TBIs are available; 2) provide a report within 120 days of enactment of this Act detailing VA’s progress on its plan for providing long-term residential care for these Veterans if VA does not have its own facilities to do so including outreach efforts to Veterans and their caregivers; 3) make publicly available and easily accessible on VA’s website a list of long-term care community providers that are within VA’s community care networks; and 4) enter into agreements to provide long-term specialty care for Veterans suffering from severe TBIs where VA-provided direct care is not available.

We appreciate your consideration of this request to improve and provide long-term care for veterans with TBIs. Thank you in advance for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress



Pete Stauber
Member of Congress